

## **After “Holocaust”. The Shoah in televised fiction in Italy and in France: a compared reading of public memory and representation (1979-2011)**

Emiliano Perra

University of Winchester

In the vast and ever expanding body of scholarly works exploring Holocaust memory and representation, television is a relatively late and largely overdue addition. This relatively small, but steadily growing body of work shows that if we want to understand the place of this event in popular memory culture, we need to look at television. Much of the existing literature in this field centres on the analysis of single countries such as the United States, Germany, Israel, Britain, or the two discussed in this article, France and Italy.<sup>1</sup> However, only a handful of studies have developed a comparative approach,<sup>2</sup> and most of this body of work is about documentaries, while works of fiction such as made-for-TV films, miniseries and series are still relatively understudied.<sup>3</sup>

And yet, TV fictions are important. As the then Fiction Manager for France Télévisions (and currently Project Manager for ARTE France) Vincent Meslet stated in 2010, ‘la fiction, c’est une

---

<sup>1</sup> See at least Jeffrey SHANDLER, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust*, New York (NY), Oxford University Press, 1999 on the United States; Wulf KANSTEINER, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz*, Athens (OH), Ohio University Press, 2006 on Germany; Oren MEYERS, Eyal ZANDBERG, and Motti NEIGER, «Prime Time Commemoration: An Analysis of Television Broadcasts on Israel’s Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Heroism», in *Journal of Communication*, 59, 2009, p. 456-80 on Israel; Judith PETERSEN, «How British Television Inserted the Holocaust into Britain’s War Memory in 1995», in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21, 2001, p. 255-72 on Britain. On Italy, see Stefano LUCONI, «Beyond *La vita è bella*: The Persecution of Jews in Early 21st-Century Italian Historical Fiction for Television», in Will LEHMAN and Margit GRIEB (eds), *Cultural Perspectives on Film, Literature, and Language*, Boca Raton (FL), BrownWalker, 2010, p. 175-85. On France, see Julie MAECK, *Montrer la Shoah à la télévision, de 1960 à nos jours*, Paris, Nouveau monde, 2009; Julie MAECK, «Le retour d’un passé sublimé dans les séries télévisuelles françaises des années 2000», in *Revue d’histoire de la Shoah*, 195, 2011, p. 317-48; Julie MAECK, «Enjeux et modalités de la présence de la Shoah sur Arte», in *Témoigner. Entre Histoire et Mémoire*, 2009, p. 97-113; Anne CROLL, «Auschwitz à la télévision: stéréotypes ou métaphore?», in *Mots/Les langages du politique*, 56, 1998, p. 121-30.

<sup>2</sup> Frank BÖSCH, «Moving History: Television and Holocaust in Central Europe since the 1950s», German Historical Institute, London, 3 March 2011); Julie MAECK, *Montrer la Shoah*, op. cit.; Andrei S. MARKOVITS and Rebecca S. HAYDEN, «Holocaust Before and After the Event: Reactions in West Germany and Austria», in *New German Critique*, 19, 1980, p. 53-80.

<sup>3</sup> There are of course exceptions; see for example Tal BRUTTMANN, «Never again, never again. Les séries américaines et la Shoah», in *Revue d’histoire de la Shoah*, 195, 2011, p. 349-72 and, about Italy and France Emiliano PERRA, «Between National and Cosmopolitan: 21st-Century Holocaust Television in Britain, France, and Italy», in Axel BANGERT, Robert GORDON and Libby SAXTON (eds), *Holocaust Intersections: Genocide and Visual Culture at the New Millennium*, London, Legenda, 2013, p. 24-45.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

question de responsabilité sociale: l'imaginaire crée de l'identité collective’.<sup>4</sup> This phrase nicely sums up one of the rationales for this article. Television dramas, often gathering millions of viewers, play an important role in the shaping of a country's views of the past and of its role within it. In other words, television is a key vector in the construction of public memory. In the context of this article, I define public memory not so much as the set of laws and official statements made by the political elite to steer a certain public recollection of the past,<sup>5</sup> but as a discursive space within society where different collective memories confront each other.<sup>6</sup> Put differently, although public memory as a social and cultural process does indeed reflect power relations, it is at the same time broader than a simple mirroring of high politics, in France and Italy as elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

This article explores TV fictions produced in France and Italy. The reason why the article compares these two countries is that their relationship with the history and memory of the Holocaust presents some important historical similarities. Just to name a few: both saw a mixture of collaborationism and resistance; both experienced German occupation but the arrests of Jews in their territory was carried out mainly by local authorities, and postwar narratives in both countries were heavily centred on the myth of the resistance and on national innocence. At the same time, they also display significant differences, in particular regarding the different size and cultural presence of their

---

<sup>4</sup> Marion FESTAËTS, «"Il faut que l'audiovisuel public constitue une BBC à la française"», in *L'Express*, 2010 <[http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/il-faut-que-l-audiovisuel-public-constitue-une-bbc-a-la-francaise\\_845022.html?xtmc=>](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/il-faut-que-l-audiovisuel-public-constitue-une-bbc-a-la-francaise_845022.html?xtmc=>) [Accessed 8 September 2012].

<sup>5</sup> On this heavily political notion of public memory, see Brian F. HAVEL, «In Search of a Theory of Public Memory: The State, the Individual, and Marcel Proust», *Indiana Law Journal*, 80, 2005, p. 605-726.

<sup>6</sup> Paolo JEDLOWSKI, «Memory and Sociology: Themes and Issues», in *Time & Society*, 10, 2001, p. 29-44; Paolo JEDLOWSKI, «Media e memoria. Costruzione sociale del passato e mezzi di comunicazione di massa», in Marita RAMPAZI and Anna Lisa TOTA (eds), *Il linguaggio del passato. Memoria collettiva, mass media e discorso pubblico*, Rome, Carocci, 2005, p. 31-43.

<sup>7</sup> The political dimension of Holocaust memory in France and Italy is emphasised by Rebecca CLIFFORD, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Joan B. WOLF, *Harnessing the Holocaust. The Politics of Memory in France*, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 2004; Peter CARRIER, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany since 1989*, New York (NY), Berghahn, 2005; Robert S. C. GORDON, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944-2010*, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 2012; Emiliano PERRA, *Conflicts of Memory: The Reception of Holocaust Films and Television Programmes in the Italian Press, 1945 to the Present*, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2010, and Giacomo LICHTNER, *Film and the Shoah in France and Italy*, London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2008. Even a work of paramount importance such as Henry ROUSSO, *Le Syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1990 has been criticised for its excessive reliance on an ‘official, and narrowly political memory’, namely by Alon CONFINO, «Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method», in *The American Historical Review*, 102, 1997, p. 1394.

respective Jewish communities, as well as a diverging process of coming to terms with the past in the last thirty years or so, with France going through a number of heated debates about Vichy while Italian debates are much more subdued. Through the prism of popular TV representations, a comparative study can highlight not just the similarities between the two countries, but also their specificities.

As the title makes clear, the analysis takes 1979 as its point of departure, the year in which the landmark miniseries *Holocaust* aired both in France and in Italy.<sup>8</sup> As it has been widely acknowledged, *Holocaust* played a huge role in situating the event at the centre of the cultural map in the US as well as in Western Europe, in particular in West Germany. However, the response in France and Italy was not equally intense. More precisely, it was intense in political terms and it no doubt helped raise Holocaust-awareness, but it came short of spurring rethinking of the two countries' own relationship with the event and their role in it. The miniseries and its reception in both countries have been already discussed in detail elsewhere, and a quick resume of the main themes will therefore be sufficient.<sup>9</sup> The miniseries was hugely successful in both countries in terms of viewing figures,<sup>10</sup> and it generated relatively similar responses from the left and the right of the political spectrum. The left interpreted the Holocaust as one example among many others of the consequence of fascism and intolerance in the twentieth century and, in particular on the far left, the miniseries as barely disguised Zionist propaganda. The conservative end of the political spectrum was in general terms more supportive of the miniseries, although many (for example, Giscard's UDF in France and some moderate commentators in Italy) feared it could trigger a wave of anti-

---

<sup>8</sup> The importance of the miniseries is highlighted by Tony JUDT, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, London, William Heynemann, 2005, p. 811.

<sup>9</sup> On *Holocaust*, see at least Judith E. DONESON, *The Holocaust in American Film*. 2nd edn, Syracuse (NY), Syracuse University Press, 2002, p. 141-96; Omer BARTOV, *The Jew in Cinema: From "The Golem" to "Don't Touch My Holocaust"*, Bloomington (IN), Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 204-223; Jeffrey SHANDLER, *While America Watches*, *op. cit.*, p. 155-175. The broadcast in France and Italy has been discussed, among others, in Henry ROUSSO, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, *op. cit.*, p. 168-172; Joan B. WOLF, *Harnessing the Holocaust*, *op. cit.*, p. 71-6; Emiliano PERRA, «Narratives of Innocence and Victimhood: The Reception of the Miniseries *Holocaust* in Italy», in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 22, 2008, p. 411-40.

<sup>10</sup> It was defined by *Le Monde* as 'the most widely watched program in the history of French television' according to David WEINBERG, «France», in David S. WYMAN (ed.), *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, Baltimore (MD), The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 25.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

German feelings that could be exploited to stifle the process of European integration. Both in Italy and in France, dominant readings of the event following the broadcast tended to present it as a ‘German thing’, or one between Germans and Jews, or presented it in overly universalising tones that eschewed from engaging with the historical specificity of the event, and in particular with the problem of domestic collaboration.<sup>11</sup>

There were, however, also significant differences. The most remarkable one consisted of the fact that *Holocaust* aired during what David Weinberg has defined as ‘by far the most traumatic assault upon French collective memory of Vichy in the postwar era’.<sup>12</sup> The story is well-known: in October 1978 *L’Express* published an interview with Louis Darquier de Pellepoix in which the former Vichy minister for Jewish Affairs claimed that only lice were gassed in Auschwitz – and the broadcast of *Holocaust* in France was very much the consequence of the outrage caused by the interview.<sup>13</sup> Only a few days later, the popular monthly history magazine *Historia* published a disturbing interview with Heydrich’s widow in which she justified her husband’s conduct against the Jews while at the same time denying the scope of the Holocaust. These two episodes were followed in November and December of the same year by the public prominence accorded to Robert Faurisson’s negationism culminating in the appearance of a piece by him on the 29 December edition of *Le Monde*.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, this type of arguments had little currency in late-1970s Italy outside far-right fringe groups.

Another significant difference between the Italian and the French reception of *Holocaust* was in the intensity of Jewish responses. In Italy, institutional Jewry and many Jewish public figures dubbed the miniseries as over-simplistic but at the same time praised it for its educational value. More importantly, they by and large refrained from putting forward claims about the uniqueness of the

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25; Joan B. WOLF, *Harnessing the Holocaust*, *op. cit.*, p. 72-3.

<sup>12</sup> David WEINBERG, ‘France’, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> *L’Express*, 28 October 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick WEIL, «The Politics of Memory: Bans and Commemorations», in Ivan HARE and James WEINSTEIN (eds), *Extreme Speech and Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 572.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

event.<sup>15</sup> In France, large sections of Jewish public opinion and intellectuals made that point in very explicit terms.<sup>16</sup> While intellectually ambiguous, the uniqueness thesis cemented Jewish identity and provided a safeguard against unbridled universalisations and relativisations, well present in the French context, but almost completely hegemonic and unchallenged in Italy. Moreover, France was somewhat forced to rethink the relationship with its Jewish community in 1980 after the Rue de Copernic bombing, which caused four non-Jewish fatalities and generated a great deal of distress among French Jews, only made worse by the inept description of the event by the Prime Minister Raymond Barre as an ‘attack that targeted Jews [...] and which struck innocent French people’.<sup>17</sup> Italy experienced something similar only in October 1982, when a bombing attack against the Synagogue in Rome in the midst of heated controversies around Israel and Jewish identity resulted in the death of four-year old Stefano Taché and an identity-clad response by large sections of Italian Jewry shrouded in Holocaust imagery.<sup>18</sup> However, the impact of this shift on broader public debates about the Holocaust was far from permanent. Holocaust discussions in Italy maintained universalising tones and marginal Jewish participation (with the notable exception of Primo Levi) well into the 1990s.<sup>19</sup>

The different forms of contribution by French and Italian Jews represent a long-term feature of the two countries’ debates about the Holocaust and its representations. However, if we look at the Holocaust-related fictions produced by Italian and French television, we see that many of these products focused on themes other than the uniqueness or comparability of the Holocaust, or the specificity of the victims. Most of the works discussed in this article have one underlying theme: the

---

<sup>15</sup> See as an example Primo LEVI, «Le immagini di Olocausto [1979]», in *Opere I*, Turin, Einaudi, 1997, p. 1275-6.

<sup>16</sup> Joan B. WOLF, *Harnessing the Holocaust*, *op. cit.*, p. 74-5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> On this, see Guri SCHWARZ, «Gli echi italiani della guerra del Libano (1982). Considerazioni su antisemitismo, autocoscienza ebraica e memoria della Shoah», in *Laboratoire italien*, 11, 2011, p. 133-58, and Lia TAGLIACOZZO, «Cronaca di un'incomprensione. La svolta del 1982 nel discorso pubblico su ebrei e Israele», in Marcello FLORES, Simon LEVIS SULLAM, Marie-Anne MATARD-BONUCCI and Enzo TRAVERSO (eds), *Storia della Shoah in Italia: Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni: Volume II: Memorie, rappresentazioni, identità*, Turin, UTET, 2010, p. 519-48.

<sup>19</sup> During the *Holocaust* debate, Renzo De Felice defined crudely but not entirely inaccurately the Italian Jewish community as ‘numerically, economically, and culturally non-influential’; see ‘Il razzista è sempre pronto’, in *L'Espresso*, 20 May 1979, p. 85.

relationship between France and Italy and the Holocaust. This is inflected in a series of conceptual couples, such as guilt and innocence, collaboration and resistance, rescue and callousness, the state and the people. In other words, many of the works discussed here talk about the Holocaust but are really about France and Italy and, whilst set in the not-so-distant past, refer to notions of national identity (French-ness and Italian-ness) in the present.

This is the case of the Italian miniseries *Storia d'amore e d'amicizia* (Story of Love and Friendship, Franco Rossi), which aired on Rete 1 in six episodes between 24 October and 28 November 1982.<sup>20</sup> It is the story, sprawling between 1935 and 1943, of Davide Sonnino and Cesare Costantini, two poor ragmen and promising boxers living in the working-class district of *Trastevere* in Rome. Davide is a Jew, Cesare is the son of an antifascist. They both fall in love with Rina, a neighbour who is also Jewish. Rina eventually chooses to marry Davide. Neither the brief rivalry between the two young men, nor the much more enduring persecutions resulting from Fascism, harm their friendship. The first to suffer fascist persecution is Cesare, who is forced to abandon the world of boxing for his political inclinations. He is later sent in political exile for two years and is reduced to resuming his precarious life selling rags once he returns to Rome. In the meantime Davide, who has become national champion, is stripped of his title with the passing of the racial laws and banned from attending his gym. After a series of humiliating jobs, Davide migrates to America, but he returns to Rome in 1941. The three are still struggling to make ends meet when news of the collapse of the regime reach them in July 1943. Cesare resumes political activity, while Davide begins to traffic smuggled goods. Having narrowly escaped deportation in the big roundup of 16 October 1943, Davide, Rina and their two children find sanctuary in an Augustine monastery, but are forced to flee. When their new hiding place is discovered by the Germans, Davide sacrifices himself to save his family.

The miniseries offers an interesting snapshot of the place of the Holocaust in Italian public memory of the war. The persecution of the Jews was presented as distinct but on a par with that of

---

<sup>20</sup> The mini-series is based on Guglielmo SPOLETINI, *La ballata di un campione*, Rome, Totem, 1985.

antifascists. As Millicent Marcus has noted, with this miniseries, the Holocaust ‘found its way into the forefront of popular historical consciousness.’<sup>21</sup> In it, viewers received fairly detailed information about the persecutions, the roundup, as well as the deportation. *Storia d’amore e d’amicizia* plays out the dynamic between private and public forms of commitment and response to fascist persecution. While Davide and Rina try to save themselves and their children, Cesare devotes himself to the public cause of liberation and, with his political insights, provides vital advice to Davide and Rina. While showing the inhumanity of fascist persecutions, the miniseries also stresses ordinary Italians’ distance from the regime. This approach is summed up by Davide’s cry, out of amusement and relief, that two Austrian deserters (presumably Catholics) he meets in the monastery are ‘just like the Italians’ in their rejection of war. The monastery scene also pays homage to the many acts of rescue conducted by religious institutions in Rome, as well as post-Second Vatican Council inter-religious dialogue, as when the prior welcomes the Jewish family saying that they were sent by their common Father.

The key point to emerge from the miniseries is that a more open approach to the discussion of the Holocaust in Italy was compensated by an equal emphasis on non-Jewish rescue and help. The possible clash between resistance and survival, and more in general between different political and therefore public choices, is often played out by resorting to conventional and melodramatic narrative tropes centred on private stories. Foremost among these narrative devices is that of the love triangle, in Italian as well as in French productions. Just as Cesare and Davide vie for the love of Sara in *Storia d’amore e d’amicizia*, so do Charles and Jérôme who both love Alice in *De guerre lasse* (Robert Enrico, Canal +, 1987, 16 December). Charles is a politically uncommitted and carefree collaborating businessman; Jérôme is in the Resistance and is in a relationship with the Jew Alice, whose husband committed suicide in Nazi-occupied Austria. Charles falls in love with her and takes risks to protect her. Alice will eventually leave Charles, who she loves, to rescue Jérôme

---

<sup>21</sup> Millicent MARCUS, *Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007, p. 65.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

whom she doesn't and who had been arrested. Political commitment prevails over emotions and physical attraction.

As noted by Leah Hewitt, *De guerre lasse* is part of cinematic trend fashionable in the 1980s and 1990s based on the loosening of connections between specific historical events and the representation of the German occupation in films. These films do not overly challenge viewers but offer relatively predictable stories full of clichés (including conventional portrayals of Nazis, Germans, and Resisters). Just like in *Stella* (Laurent Heynemann, 1983) the love triangle incorporates the divide between resistance and collaboration. Women in these films, Alice and Stella, favour resistance but are attracted to men who collaborate.<sup>22</sup>

If the 1980s presented relatively similar trends, the next decade saw the beginning of a significant divarication between Italy and France. In the context of a more generalised rise of Holocaust consciousness, French television starts engaging with the country's record of Jewish persecution, while its Italian counterpart lagged behind. A cornerstone in this process is often, and quite rightly, seen in the publication in 1994 of Pierre Péan's book on Mitterrand disseminating to a wide readership information about the President's activities as an official under Vichy and, perhaps even more damagingly, about his long friendship with René Bousquet, who since 1978 had been indicted as the architect of the Vel d'Hiv roundup.<sup>23</sup> The book generated discomfort amongst the public and especially on the left. Mitterrand's subsequent TV interview reaffirming his version of his own past (and by extension the country's) did little to dispel the outrage. The controversy marked the less-than-glorious end of the once hegemonic narrative that expunged Vichy from French history and in so doing relieved the Republic of the duty of dealing with such an inconvenient past. One year later, the new President Jacques Chirac distanced himself from his predecessor by acknowledging the

---

<sup>22</sup> Leah Dianne HEWITT, *Remembering the Occupation in French Film: National Identity in Postwar Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 156.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre PÉAN, *Une jeunesse française: François Mitterrand, 1934-1947*, Paris, Fayard, 1994.



“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

persecutions and deportations as historical crimes of France as a whole, thus opening a new phase in the country's politics of memory.<sup>24</sup>

However, the process had already started, albeit somewhat falteringly with the Vichy-centred docudrama *Hôtel du Parc* (Pierre Beuchot, France 3, 1992, 18 January), followed in 1993 by the theatrical release of the film *Pétain* (Jean Marbœuf, 1993), which pulled no punches in its assessment of the *maréchal* and of Pierre Laval. While this is not the place to discuss a product made for the big screen,<sup>25</sup> it is important to acknowledge the fact that self-exculpatory narratives about French innocence were running out of steam. *Hôtel du Parc* played a role in this process. The two-part programme was a highly self-conscious, sophisticated and for some dangerous exploration of the Vichy period reconstructed through the historically accurate words of some of the regime's dignitaries played by actors. The self-consciousness and sophistication of the work resides in the fact that it presents itself as a fake documentary that sets itself the ambitious task of offering viewers a truth about Vichy that would not emerge from archival footage; its dangerous nature consists for critics of the programme not so much in its avowed inauthenticity, but in the fact that it relies entirely on the words of the *Vichystes* themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of whether or not the docudrama fails to adequately distance itself from the characters it portrays, it not only documents French active responsibility in the arrests and deportations of Jews, but also illustrates the domestic nature of Vichy's anti-Semitism. This emerges with clarity towards the end of the second episode, when Xavier Vallat justifies the anti-Jewish measures introduced while he was Commissaire général aux questions juives with the claim that they were based on

---

<sup>24</sup> Richard J. GOLDSAN, *Vichy's Afterlife: History and Counterhistory in Postwar France*, Lincoln (NE), University of Nebraska Press, 2000, p. 103-123; Rebecca CLIFFORD, *Commemorating the Holocaust*, *op. cit.*, p. 190-4; Joan B. WOLF, *Harnessing the Holocaust*, *op. cit.*, p. 159-78.

<sup>25</sup> On *Pétain*, see the positive review by Eric CONAN, «Pétain, le film», in *L'Express*, 1993 <[http://www.lexpress.fr/informations/petaain-le-film\\_605326.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/informations/petaain-le-film_605326.html)> [Accessed 5 September 2012].

<sup>26</sup> François NIMEY, *L'Épreuve du réel à l'écran: essai sur le principe de réalité documentaire*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2000, p. 278; Isabelle VEYRAT-MASSON, *Télévision et histoire, la confusion des genres: docudramas, docufictions et fictions du reel*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2008, p. 76-9; see also the director's retrospective look at the programme in Pierre BEUCHOT, «Hôtel du Parc: Le mentir vrai ou une fiction en forme de documentaire», in *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 89-90, 2008, p. 101-08.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

religious as opposed to racial grounds, and were therefore consistent with Catholic doctrine (and one is entitled to infer, more in line with French history).<sup>27</sup>

*Hôtel du Parc* is a prime example of French TV representations that over the years have probed into the role played by Vichy in the Holocaust. Flash-forwarding of a decade, an even more brutal look is the one put forward in the TV movie *93, rue Lauriston* (Denys Granier-Deferre, Canal +, 2004, 14 December). Originally aired on the small pay TV channel Canal +, the film garnered a much broader audience when it was broadcast on Channel 2 in September 2006. It describes with no embellishments the actions of the *Carlingue*, the French Gestapo, against opponents, Jews and other innocent victims of their brutality. In particular, it denounces the ‘véritable système’ in which ‘truands et flics collaboraient en bonne intelligence et avec l'ennemi’.<sup>28</sup> The film puts on screen infamous figures such as Henry Lafont (real name Henry Chamberlin) and Pierre Bony as well as others more pathetic such as Léon Jabinet, who slipped into collaboration before redeeming himself joining the Resistance, only to eventually commit suicide. The film does not limit itself to expose the dark and brutal side of part of the French state during the occupation, it also indicts post-liberation France, heavily hinting at the failed *épuration*.<sup>29</sup> The film received wide and deserved praise, for example by *Le Parisien* and *L'Humanité*, which euglogised it as a product that ‘gratte [et] dérange’.<sup>30</sup>

Products like *93, rue Lauriston* signal two noteworthy changes in recent television programming about World War II-related history in France. The first one is a more open approach to unpleasant pages of French history. As we will see, this change does not present itself without its counterforces; but it is significant nonetheless. The second one is that the Holocaust plays a major role, even in narratives *prima facie* not about it. Such is the case of two docufictions that aired in

---

<sup>27</sup> On Vallat, see Laurent JOLY, *Xavier Vallat, 1891-1972: Du nationalisme chrétien à l'antisémitisme d'État*, Paris, Grasset, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Sébastien HOMER, «93, rue Lauriston», in *L'Humanité*, 14 December 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Denise BRAHIMI, *Les téléfilms français: Nos contes initiatiques*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011, p. 107.

<sup>30</sup> «Canal + ose la fiction historique», in *Le Parisien*, 2004, <<http://www.leparisien.fr/loisirs-et-spectacles/canal-ose-la-fiction-historique-14-12-2004-2005536749.php>> [Accessed 13 February 2013]; Sébastien HOMER, «Sinistre Carlingue», in *L'Humanité*, 9 July 2005.

2008: *La Résistance* (Félix Olivier, France 2 and France 5, 2008, 18,19, 22, 29 February and 7, 14 March) and Serge Moati's *Mitterrand à Vichy* (France 2, 22 April). These docufictions cover two key aspects of France's relationship with the Holocaust such as collaboration with, and resistance to, the persecution and deportation of Jews under French authority.

*La Résistance* was an ambitious 388-minute docufiction presenting a comprehensive history of the Resistance that included the *maquis* as well as unarmed resistance, political opposition as well as humanitarian rescue. In other words, the docufiction aimed at joining political revolt against the occupation and opposition to the Holocaust into one single narrative. The result is a fairly binary account that glorifies the French people and substantially clears low- and mid-level Vichy functionaries while damning their leaders. This narrative is deployed in its entirety in the first two episodes, *Vivre libre ou mourir* and *Quand il fallait sauver les juifs*, which served as a showcase for the whole series, since they were 90 minutes long each and aired on the mainstream France 2 instead of the 52 minutes each on the niche channel France 5 accorded to the remaining four. Preceded by the disclaimer that 'all scenes in this film are authentic', the docufiction argues that Pétain targeted Jews as part of what he perceived as anti-France – and for this reason Vichy passed anti-Semitic laws without waiting for a German request and set up camps such as Pithiviers (which *La Résistance* rushes to define as only officially under French administration but *de facto* ruled by the SS). However, the French people were not anti-Semites; they failed to revolt against the racist laws only because the government did not publicise them. Proof of their lack of prejudice was, according to *La Résistance*, the failure of the exhibition *Le Juif et la France* organised by the Germans in Paris in September 1941 to elicit local anti-Semitism. Moreover, la rafle du Vél d'Hiv was boycotted by many officers, allowing two thirds of the Jews targeted for arrest to escape and find refuge among the population. *La Résistance* claims that by 1943 'civil society had become a solidarity society' establishing an efficient rescue network, while the resistance reached the mountains and became *les maquis*. While the collaboration between the curiously defined 'two anti-Semitic regimes in Europe' grew increasingly solid, the joint effort of the armed Resistance and an

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

organised rescue network, bolstered by a peaceful army of ordinary citizens, prevented the number of victims from exceeding 76,000 while 250,000 Jews survived – figures summarised in a caption at the end of the second episode.<sup>31</sup>

This is clearly a rather selective narrative. It largely relied on the type of clear-cut binary distinctions between the Resistance as the true France on the one hand and Vichy on the other that had influenced French public memory well into the 1980s. In particular, it went against the grain of a significant trend of 2008. As historian Barnett Singer noted regarding Vichy, in 2008 ‘nuancing was [...] the order of the day’.<sup>32</sup> That year saw a number of publications that indeed went to great lengths to add complexity to the retelling of wartime France’s history, culminating with Simon Epstein’s book on the presence of antiracists in Vichy and anti-Semites within the Resistance.<sup>33</sup>

In the same year, a distinctive contribution to this process of ‘nuancing’ was made by the docufiction *Mitterrand à Vichy*, based on the book by Pierre Péan mentioned elsewhere in this article. The docufiction aired during prime-time on France 2 and was followed by the documentary by Hugues Nancy *Mitterrand à Vichy, le choc d'une révélation* (France 2, 22 April) that assembled interviews with a number of historians and associates of Mitterrand’s in order to understand his conduct in Vichy, as well as his unapologetic response to the issue when it first became public. The docufiction and documentary comprising *Mitterrand à Vichy* present themselves as a poised retrospective look. Both products stressed very carefully that distinctions were not necessarily categorical, that *Vichysto-résistants* were legion, and that Mitterrand had indeed played an

---

<sup>31</sup> This narrative is clearly influenced by the work of Jacques SÉMELIN, *Unarmed against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939-1943*, trans. Suzan HUSSERL-KAPIT, Westport (CT), Praeger, 1993. Sémelin was one of the series’ historical advisers.

<sup>32</sup> Barnett SINGER, «The changing image of Vichy in France», in *Contemporary Review*, 2009, <<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+changing+image+of+Vichy+in+France-a0205755180>> [Accessed 2 December 2010].

<sup>33</sup> Simon EPSTEIN, *Un paradoxe français: antiracistes dans la Collaboration, antisémites dans la Résistance*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2008. Other books published in 2008 include Thomas RABINO, *Le Réseau Carte, histoire d'un réseau de la Résistance antiallemand, antigaulliste, anticommuniste et anticollaborationniste*, Paris, Perrin, 2008 and Bénédicte VEERGEZ-CHAIGNON, *Les vichysto-résistants: de 1940 à nos jours*, Paris, Perrin, 2008.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

important role in the Resistance.<sup>34</sup> This equitable look at the past garnered overwhelming praise, albeit with the exception of Mitterrand's widow.<sup>35</sup>

However, 2008 also signalled a shift opposite to the ‘nuance’ trend. This shift is best exemplified by the reports on public commemorations drafted by two commissions, one presided over by eminent historian André Kaspi (commissioned by the Minister of Defence who was also in charge of Veterans' Affairs) and the other by the President of the National Assembly, Bernard Accoyer. While this is not the place for a detailed discussion of these reports, it is important to note that they both converge in their guidelines about the need for the State to disinvest in commemorations of victimhood – not least because of the danger of competition among different victim groups (for example, between Jewish and Arab French citizens with regards to the Shoah and the war of Algeria) – and on the opportunity to ‘decentralise’ commemorations that do not fit in the master paradigm of national unity. Besides highlighting the importance of the role played by the media, this decentralisation of commemoration is specifically intended both as local and as supranational, in particular as regards the memory of the Shoah, officially commemorated every 27 January both in Europe and globally by the UN.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Moati emphasised this aspect in an interview he gave to the *Nouvel observateur* on the eve of the broadcast; see «Mitterrand et Vichy», in *nouvelobs.com*, 2008, <[http://tchat.nouvelobs.com/recherche/tchat,20081204113620228.html?xtmc=mitterrand\\_vichy&xtr=4](http://tchat.nouvelobs.com/recherche/tchat,20081204113620228.html?xtmc=mitterrand_vichy&xtr=4)> [Accessed 3 December 2010].

<sup>35</sup> For the praise, see Christophe BARBIER, «Les années grises de Mitterrand», in *L'Express*, 2008, <[http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/les-annees-grises-de-mitterrand\\_472638.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/les-annees-grises-de-mitterrand_472638.html)> [Accessed 3 December 2010]; Mathieu CASTAGNET, «Mitterrand à Vichy, retour sur un passé qui n'est pas passé», in *la Croix*, 2008, <<http://www.la-croix.com/article/index.jsp?docId=2335410&rubId=5548>> [Accessed 3 December 2010]; Eric CONAN, «Mitterrand, retour sur “les années Vichy”», in *Marianne*, 2008, <[http://www.marianne2.fr/Mitterrand-retour-sur-les-annees-Vichy\\_a86261.html](http://www.marianne2.fr/Mitterrand-retour-sur-les-annees-Vichy_a86261.html)> [Accessed 8 December 2010]; Alain DUHAMEL, «Mitterrand, Vichy et la Résistance», in *Libération*, 2008, <<http://www.liberation.fr/tribune/010179383-mitterrand-vichy-et-la-resistance>> [Accessed 2 December 2010]. Danielle Mitterrand criticised the docufiction's dating of Mitterrand's switch to the Resistance in 1943 instead of late 1942. Her critique was published in Emmanuel BERRETTA, «François Mitterrand: nouvelle controverse sur son passé vichyste», in *Le Point*, 2008, <<http://www.lepoint.fr/archives/article.php/237328>> [Accessed 3 December 2010]; Hubert VÉDRINE, «Retour nécessaire sur deux controverses», in *La Lettre de l'Institut François Mitterrand*, n° 23, 2008, <<http://www.mitterrand.org/Retour-necessaire-sur-deux.html>> [Accessed 3 December 2010]. The only negative review was Thierry LECLÈRE, «Mitterrand à Vichy Documentaire-fiction de Serge Moati (France, 2008)», in *Télérama*, 2008, <<http://www.telerama.fr/divers/27791.php>> [Accessed 8 December 2010].

<sup>36</sup> André KASPI, ed., *Rapport de la Commission de réflexion sur la modernisation des commémorations publiques*, Paris, Secrétariat d'Etat à la Défense et aux Anciens Combattants, 2008; M. Bernard ACCOYER (ed.), *Rapport d'information fait en application de l'article 145 du Règlement au nom de la mission d'information sur les questions mémorielles*, Paris, Assemblée Nationale, 2008. For extensive discussion of the two reports and their implications, see Johann MICHEL, *Gouverner les mémoires. Les Politiques mémorielles en France*, Paris, PUF, 2010; Johann MICHEL,

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

Whilst these counterforces are far from isolated and without clout, the ‘nuanced’ trend is palpable, and it shows some form of synergy between historiographical debate and television divulgation, even considering the many examples that could point in a different directions. The final example I’d like to discuss of this trend is the successful series *Un village français*, written and directed by a team led by Frédéric Krivine and Philippe Triboit and airing on France 3 since 2009. The series is set in the fictional village of Villeneuve in the Jura department during the German occupation. In its story arc of seven seasons, covering the years 1940-1945, the series explores the gamut of reactions to the unfolding of events among the inhabitants of the village, with their mixture of courage and fear, opportunism and bravery, foresightedness and myopia, and of course collaboration and resistance, with a range of different shades of grey in between. It is, in short, a dramatization of the ‘Occupation vue d’en bas.’<sup>37</sup> Among the events witnessed by the inhabitants of Villeneuve is the persecution of Jews. The long length and chronological span of the series allows the series to present not only different responses to the Jewish plight among different people, but also how each character’s perception of it was often changeable and influenced by a number of other factors.

In this sense, while *L’express*’ Marion Festraëts’ claim that *Un village français* ‘montre le conflit comme on ne l’a jamais vu’ might be an overstatement, her other claim that ‘les protagonistes sont vierges’ in the sense that they come *before* Auschwitz and therefore ‘naviguent à vue’, doutent [et] commettent des erreurs’ vis-à-vis the persecution is much more exact.<sup>38</sup> Thus, among its strengths, the series shows how a central aspect of the Second World War such as the deportation of the Jews crept in progressively, starting from foreign or denaturalised Jews (one of the main themes of Season 4, set in 1942, is precisely the imprisonment of a group of such Jews in Villeneuve’s school,

---

«La fragmentation des régimes mémoriels dans la France contemporaine», in Marie-Luisa FRICK, Pascal MBONGO and Florian SCHALLART (eds), *PluralismusKonflikte - Le pluralisme en conflits: Österreichisch-Französische Begegnungen*, Wien, Lit Verlag, 2010, p. 21-41; Johann MICHEL, «Regards croisés sur les rapports Kaspi et Accoyer: Le retour du régime mémoriel d’unité nationale», in Michel DANTI-JUAN (ed.), *La mémoire et le crime*, Paris, Éditions CUJAS, 2011, p. 199-216.

<sup>37</sup> Olivier THOMAS, «L’Occupation vue d’en bas», in *L’Histoire*, 342, 2009, p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> Marion FESTRAËTS, «Un village français, sur France 3», in *L’Express*, 2009, <[http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/chaine/un-village-francais-sur-france-3\\_761606.html?xtmc=>](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/chaine/un-village-francais-sur-france-3_761606.html?xtmc=>) [Accessed 7 September 2012].

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

and non-Jewish inhabitants of the town's response). As noted by Gilles Heuré, the series' ability to restore the necessary measure of contingency to history allows it to illuminate through the microcosm of a village in the Jura how 1942 became a turning point and a moment of decision for many in France.<sup>39</sup>

The main symbol of this approach to this difficult page of the French past is represented by Daniel Larcher, played by Robin Renucci, the doctor and Vichy-appointed mayor who dutifully accepts his task in 1940 but drags his feet and is forced to resign two years later, once he has seen the deportation of families in sealed trains. As Renucci himself explains, the doctor/mayor serves an essential function because he is ‘un personnage qui permet la conscientisation du public.’<sup>40</sup> In other words, *Un village français* is significant from our point of view for at least three reasons. Firstly, because it is a sprawling epic set in a fictional village but with obvious ambitions to reveal broader truths about France (not too different in this from the ambition behind Edgar Reitz's 1984 *Heimat*). Secondly because, whilst the series acknowledges that ‘le monde n'est pas manichéen’, these truths about France include the extent of collaboration within the French state, for example in figures such as the ambitious police officer Jean Marchetti, the collaborationist and ruthless compiler of the list of foreign Jews to arrest *sous-préfet* Servier, and the President of the local *Chambre de commerce* Philippe Chassagne. Indeed, the fact that at least two of them, Marchetti and Servier, are three-dimensional complex characters, occasionally humane and not devoid of common sense, inherently interrogates viewers. Thirdly, and most importantly, *Un village français* is an ambitious French *Heimat* for the twenty-first century, an age in which, contrary to its German predecessor, the

---

<sup>39</sup> Sophie BOURDAIS, «Complètement PAF #26, le débat des critiques télé: les fictions historiques en vedette», in *Télérama*, 2012, <<http://television.telarama.fr/television/complement-paf-26-le-debat-des-critiques-tele-les-fictions-historiques-en-vedette,79228.php>> [Accessed 26 September 2012].

<sup>40</sup> Stéphanie RAÏO, «Renucci: "Un village français ne juge pas"», in *lefigaro.fr*, 2012, <<http://tvmag.lefigaro.fr/programme-tv/article/serie/69296/renucci-un-village-francais-ne-juge-pas-.html>> [Accessed 8 September 2012].

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

Holocaust plays a central role in the construction of French identity and reflections about the country's past.<sup>41</sup>

It is for these reasons that, despite the series' many flaws, one can agree with the historical advisor for the series Jean-Pierre Azéma's relishing of the 'occasion exceptionnelle [...] de présenter sans dogmatisme, avec rigueur et souplesse, les résultats de nos travaux sur un sujet d'intérêt qu'on peut qualifier de civique.'<sup>42</sup> *Un village français* marks the transition to a different regime of memory about the war, the occupation, and the Holocaust in French television discourse. The series, successful enough to gather a loyal and growing audience just shy of 4 million in Season 4, counter and provide an antidote to more reassuring accounts such as the one provided in *La Résistance*.<sup>43</sup>

Little of all this emerges from an analysis of Italian TV Holocaust-related narratives. In fact, the opposite trend is at work: the main development is the rise of a pernicious revisionism. The main aspects of this revisionism have been identified many times by scholars and do not need extensive treatment here.<sup>44</sup> In brief, since the 1980s, and more decidedly since the political rise of the centre-right coalitions led by Silvio Berlusconi and incorporating a range of post- and neo-fascist forces, there has been a persistent emphasis among more conservative opinion-makers on doing away with antifascism as the cornerstone of Italian republican identity. This politico-cultural extended context could not but exert influence on television programming, especially in a country with a system of

---

<sup>41</sup> On the lack of extensive engagement with the Holocaust in *Heimat*, see Anton KAES, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 185-6; Alon CONFINO, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History*, Chapel Hill (NC), The University of North Carolina Press, 2006, p. 60. However, for a sophisticated different view, see Paolo JEDLOWSKI, *Il racconto come dimora. "Heimat" e le memorie d'Europa*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2009, p. 51-2; see also Damiano GAROFALO, «Senza immagini: La presenza della Shoah in *Heimat* di Edgar Reitz (1984-2006)», in *Bollettino di storiografia*, 15, 2011, p. 35-42.

<sup>42</sup> Marion FESTAËTS, «"Il faut que l'audiovisuel public constitue une BBC à la française"», in *L'Express*, 2010, <[http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/il-faut-que-l-audiovisuel-public-constitue-une-bbc-a-la-francaise\\_845022.html?xtmc=>](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/il-faut-que-l-audiovisuel-public-constitue-une-bbc-a-la-francaise_845022.html?xtmc=>) [Accessed 8 September 2012]; «Zoom Sur... Un Village Français», in *culturclub.com*, 2009, <[http://www.culturclub.com/circus/jdp\\_alachaine/jdp-chaine-0075\\_un-village-francais\\_zoom.html](http://www.culturclub.com/circus/jdp_alachaine/jdp-chaine-0075_un-village-francais_zoom.html)> [Accessed 9 September 2012].

<sup>43</sup> Chrystel CHABERT, «Pour la saison 5, "Un village français" prend le maquis en Limousin», in *francetv.fr*, 2012, <<http://www.francetv.fr/culturebox/pour-la-saison-5-un-village-francais-prend-le-maquis-en-limousin-109125>> [Accessed 8 September 2012].

<sup>44</sup> For a recent and alarming treatment among the many, see Aram MATTIOLI, *"Viva Mussolini!": Die Aufwertung des Faschismus im Italien Berlusconis*, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010.



“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

TV governance as receptive to political influence as in Italy.<sup>45</sup> Governments and their political majorities nominate the majority of members in the board of governors of State TV RAI. For this reason parties supporting the government exert a direct influence on programming. In the political climate above described, this meant levelling historical (and moral) differences between fascists and antifascists, presenting both as perpetrators and victims to the same degree. The big stumbling block in the construction of this type of narrative in the current Holocaust-conscious age is precisely Fascism's responsibility for the persecution of Jews in Italy. Historical TV films and miniseries produced in Italy on World War II and Holocaust-related topics can often be read as attempts to downplay political differences between fascism and antifascism and disentangle individual fascists and the State more in general from the historical guilt of the regime. One way of achieving this result is to put on screen stories of rescue that situate fascist figures and members of the State apparatus within the time-honoured tradition of the 'good (Catholic) Italian'. As the next pages will show, the results are often disturbing.

In the new century, RAI aired a number of TV-films and miniseries on Holocaust-related themes, as well as more generally on Italy during the war. Many of these fictions are very liberal 'free adaptations' of historical events or pure fictions. A number of them invite viewers to side with the point of view of fascists or German officers. A well-known example of this turn is represented by the miniseries *Il cuore nel pozzo* (Alberto Negrin, Rai Uno, 6-7 February 2005), dealing with the controversial killing of ethnic Italians (seen as fascist victimisers) by Titoist partisans in Istria at the end of the war, and in a way that has been judged 'unashamedly sympathetic to the Italian ethnic cause'.<sup>46</sup> Such was also the case of *La guerra è finita* (Lodovico Gasparini, Rai Uno, 5-6 May 2002), a sort of *Jules et Jim* set in Nazi-occupied Italy. The two friends and love rivals Claudio and Ettore separate when the former joins the X MAS battalion in the Italian Social Republic, while the

---

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of the Berlusconi governments' political influence over television in Italy, see Matthew HIBBERD, *The Media in Italy: Press, Cinema and Broadcasting from Unification to Digital*, Maidenhead Open University Press, 2008, p. 114-116.

<sup>46</sup> Martin PURVIS and David ATKINSON, «Performing Wartime Memories: Ceremony as Contest at the Risiera di San Sabba Death Camp, Trieste», in *Social & Cultural Geography*, 10, 2009, p. 344. See also Susanne C. KNITTEL, «Memory Redux: The Foibe on Italian Television», in *The Italianist*, 34, 2014, p. 170-85.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

latter joins the partisans (and along with his beloved Giulia kills Claudio's father). The miniseries is a revisionist melodrama that sides with Claudio, portrayed as the only one to be consistent with his ideals, while the others were consumed by hatred and opportunistic in joining the stronger side (i.e. the Allies).

Even more noteworthy was *Al di là delle frontiere* (Maurizio Zaccaro, Rai Uno, 2-3 May 2004), a miniseries based on the memoirs of Angela Ghignino/Nini Wiedemann, former partisan and lover (and future wife) of Wehrmacht official Hans Wiedemann.<sup>47</sup> The miniseries adopts the trope of the love story between formal enemies to signify national and ideological reconciliation to viewers. It is a well-known technique, deployed in other historical dramas like the aforementioned *Il cuore nel pozzo* and *Edda Ciano e il comunista* (Graziano Diana, Rai Uno, 2011). The trope is not just seen in Italian television, either. For example, in Germany the lavish *teamWorx* productions *Dresden* (Roland Suso Richter, ZDF, 2006) and *Die Flucht* (Kai Wessel, ARD/ARTE, 2007) centred on the romance between German women and a British pilot and a French forced labourer, respectively.<sup>48</sup> By telling stories of women who counter official Nazi policy with their transnational love, these miniseries project an image of current Germans as peace-loving Europeans.

However, *Al di là delle frontiere* is different in one important aspect: the focalisation is that of Hans and viewers are invited to see the action through his eyes, or alternatively those of Angela, who represents a stand-in for Germans through her association with Hans. Here, the influence of the political and cultural revisionist *Zeitgeist* is particularly palpable, and Italians are all represented as untrustworthy potential Resistance fighters. Moreover, in a curious conflation of political, gender and class stereotypes, Angela is attacked by a group of peasant women who are depicted as a horde

---

<sup>47</sup> Nini WIEDEMANN, *Al di là delle frontiere*, Florence: Loggia de' Lanzi, 1998.

<sup>48</sup> On these two German miniseries, see Tim BERGFELDER, «Shadowlands: The Memory of the *Ostgebiete* in Contemporary German Film and Television», in Paul COOKE and Marc SILBERMAN (eds), *Screening War: Perspectives on German Suffering*, Rochester (NY), Camden House, 2010, p. 123-42; David F. CREW, «Sleeping with the Enemy? A Fiction Film for German Television about the Bombing of Dresden», in *Central European History*, 40, 2007, p. 117-32; Wilfried WILMS, «Dresden: The Return of History as Soap», in Jaimey FISHER and Brad PRAGER (eds), *The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, Detroit (MI), Wayne State University Press, 2010, p. 136-56; Linda ROBERTSON, «Dresden (2006): Marketing the Bombing of Dresden in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States», in Douglas A. CUNNINGHAM and John C. NELSON (eds), *A Companion to the War Film*, Chichester, Wiley Blackwell, 2016, p. 234-52.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

of dehumanized harpies of sorts. Such is the identification with the German perspective that even the soundtrack at one point is no less than a violin version of the German national anthem. One further example of this liberal use of history is offered by the 2004 Holocaust fiction *La fuga degli innocenti* (Leone Pompucci, 16-17 May 2004), which represented the alliance between the Italian Social Republic and Nazi Germany with the image of a group of Italian *carabinieri* pointing rifles at Wehrmacht soldiers.

This cavalier approach to history, combined with the strong penchant for hagiographic representation of historical figures (be they religious, political, or even sporting ones) that defines many TV fictions in Italy produces an important effect. Besides depictions of fascist rescuers who actually did save Jews such as Giorgio Perlasca, Holocaust miniseries in Italy overstate or create from scratch acts of opposition and rescue with no historical foundation; this is because, if collaboration in the persecution of the Jews is damning and unredeemable, representations that situate themselves within the dominant twenty-first century discourse that levels differences between fascists and antifascists must emphasise or invent opposition to the persecution.<sup>49</sup>

This is probably the case of the miniseries *Senza confini* (Fabrizio Costa, Rai Uno, 2001) reconstructing the story of the chief of Italian police in Fiume (Rijeka) Giovanni Palatucci, who allegedly saved up to 5000 Jews according to some rather optimistic estimates, but was eventually arrested for ‘intelligence with the enemy’ and deported to Dachau, where he died.<sup>50</sup> Palatucci has been awarded the title of ‘Righteous among the Nations’ by Yad Vashem, and canonization from the Catholic Church is underway. According to some narratives, Palatucci arrested and ‘deported’ thousands of Jews away from Nazi eyes to the camp of Campagna in his native Campania, a territory whose bishop was Giovanni’s uncle Monsignor Giuseppe Maria Palatucci, who would then

---

<sup>49</sup> I have already discussed the Perlasca miniseries in Emiliano PERRA, «Legitimizing Fascism through the Holocaust? The Reception of the Miniseries *Perlasca: un eroe italiano* in Italy», in *Memory Studies*, 3, 2010, p. 95-109.

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth BETTINA, *It Happened in Italy: Untold Stories of How the People of Italy Defied the Holocaust* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), p. 18; Susan ZUCCOTTI, *The Italians and the Holocaust. Persecution, Rescue, and Survival*. 2nd edn, Lincoln (NE), University of Nebraska Press, 1996, p. 218-9. On *Senza confini*, see Millicent MARCUS, *Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz*, *op. cit.*, p. 137-9.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

assist them under the discrete but benevolent supervision of Pius XII.<sup>51</sup> The reality beyond the myth is probably less glamorous, and much historical research has yet to be done on the topic.<sup>52</sup>

Besides the police officer Palatucci, other figures of the State apparatus are exonerated from complicity in the persecution of the Jews in these popular representations. These include the royal family in *Maria Josè: l'ultima regina* (Carlo Lizzani, Rai Uno, 7-8 January 2002), which takes pains to show that King Victor Emmanuel III opposed (but duly signed) the 1938 anti-Semitic laws, and fascist leaders such as Mussolini's son-in-law and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Galeazzo Ciano, who is presented in *Edda* (Giorgio Capitani, Rai Uno, 23-24 May 2005) as an unlikely hero and a moral example who rejects the racial laws, whereas in fact, when the laws were passed, he had given the Duce his full support.<sup>53</sup> Even an important future Prime Minister and Christian Democrat leader such as Alcide De Gasperi, whose historical stature would survive unscathed a non-simplistic approach, is presented in the biopic miniseries *De Gasperi: l'uomo della speranza* (Liliana Cavani, Rai Uno, 24-25 April 2005) as being incensed by the racial laws, but not as the man who, writing with the *nom de plume* Spectator in *L'Illustrazione Vaticana*, had expressed the wish that ‘Italian racism will put in place concrete measures to defend and increase the value of the nation’.<sup>54</sup>

A recent and particularly indicative example of this exculpating trend is offered by the miniseries *Sanguepazzo* (Marco Tullio Giordana, Rai Uno, 30-31 May 2010), directed by acclaimed filmmaker Marco Tullio Giordana. It is the romanticized story of Osvaldo Valenti and Luisa Ferida, two stars of fascist cinema and partners in life who wholeheartedly supported the Italian Social Republic and joined the X MAS commando, mainly employed as an anti-partisan force. In this capacity, they most likely took part in the torture of antifascists and for this reason were executed shortly after the

---

<sup>51</sup> Susan ZUCCOTTI, «Pope Pius XII and the Rescue of Jews in Italy: Evidence of a Papal Directive?», *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18, 2004, p. 261.

<sup>52</sup> See Marco COSLOVICH, *Giovanni Palatucci. Una giusta memoria*, Atripalda: Mephite, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Ray MOSELEY, «Ciano, Galeazzo», in Victoria DE GRAZIA and Sergio LUZZATTO (eds), *Dizionario del fascismo*, Turin, Einaudi, 2005, p. 280.

<sup>54</sup> Paolo PICCOLI and Armando VADAGNINI, *De Gasperi: Un trentino nella storia d'Europa*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2004, p. 36; Franco CUOMO, *I dieci: Chi erano gli scienziati che firmarono il Manifesto della razza*, Milan, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2005, p. 24-5; Stefano LUCONI, «Beyond *La vita è bella*», *op. cit.*, p. 180.

“This is an accepted manuscript of an article published in *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*. It is not the copy of record.”

Liberation. This miniseries too is lenient with its characters, inserting an episode of sympathy expressed by Valenti for the Jewish porter of the hotel where he lives that has no confirmation in any of the evidence available.<sup>55</sup>

This body of cultural products undoubtedly proposes a reconciliation of the notoriously fractured Italian historical memories.<sup>56</sup> This is understandable in countries that experienced extensive levels of collaboration. There are several examples of this trend in French television too, such as *La colline aux mille enfants* (Jean-Louis Lorenzi, France 2, 3 October 1994) loosely based on the remarkable rescue operation put in place by the Protestant community of Chambon-sur-Lignon, and *La Dame d'Izieu* (Alain Wermus, TF1, 12 and 19 March 2007) on Sabine Zlatin's eventually unsuccessful attempt to shelter Jewish children in Izieu with the help of the local sous-préfet.<sup>57</sup> However, the trend originating since the early 1990s questioning the issue of French responsibility in the Holocaust, and which, whilst not unchallenged, has nonetheless proceeded unabated ever since producing TV films and miniseries such as the ones discussed in this article, go a long way in providing a more historically balanced and comprehensive account.<sup>58</sup>

These different approaches to national guilt in France and Italy give different meaning to the many stories that emphasise rescue in both countries. Italian television, not just in fictional products but also in most documentaries, is overwhelmingly unbalanced towards episodes of rescue. Too much emphasis on rescue is bound to overshadow guilt, and when self-congratulation replaces soul-search entirely, the serious danger is to have a country that fails to come to terms with the past. The

---

<sup>55</sup> On Calenti and Ferida, see Romano BRACALINI, *Celebri e dannati: Osvaldo Valenti e Luisa Ferida: storia e tragedia di due divi del regime*, Milan, Longanesi, 1985.

<sup>56</sup> John FOOT, *Italy's Divided Memory*, New York (NY), Palgrave, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> On these historical events, and in part on the products representing them, see at least Maurice CAPUL, «Une maison d'enfants pendant la guerre 1939-1945: Moissac», in *Empan*, 57, 2005, p. 20-27; Jean-Louis LORENZI and Patrick CABANEL, «A propos de *La Colline aux mille enfants* (1994): Entretien entre Jean-Louis Lorenzi et Patrick Cabanel», in *Bulletin - Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, 154, 2008, p. 219-24; Sabine ZLATIN, *Mémoires de la "Dame d'Izieu": avec sa déposition au procès Barbie et les témoignages de Gabrielle Perrier et de Samuel Pintel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

<sup>58</sup> My view of French historical television programming is thus more generous than Isabelle VEYRAT-MASSON, «Staging Historical Leaders on French Television: The Example of Napoleon Bonaparte», in Erin BELL and Ann GRAY (eds), *Televising History: Mediating the Past in Postwar Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 95-106.

politics of memory about the Second World War in France and Italy had similar developments until well into the 1970s, with a significant divergence emerging in the 1980s. The specific political and cultural developments of the two countries in the 1990s made the bifurcation obvious. In France, the controversy around Mitterrand and Vichy in 1994, followed by Chirac's acknowledgment of the French state's burden of guilt vis-à-vis the Holocaust sat in stark contrast with Italy's awkward relationship between the legitimisation of the fascist past on the one hand and the recognition of the existence of the Holocaust in Italy on the other. This clumsy dynamic finds a prime example in the maladroit wording of the 2000 law establishing the *Giorno della memoria*, which commemorates the Holocaust but never mentions Fascism,<sup>59</sup> and is equally apparent in television. Seen as a whole, these distortions not only collude in perpetuating the myth of the 'good Italian', but also often propose a reversal of history that runs the risk of setting Italy's Holocaust discourse outside of the narrow field of professional historiography apart from that of its Western partners.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Robert S. C. GORDON, «The Holocaust in Italian Collective Memory: *Il giorno della memoria*, 27 January 2001», in *Modern Italy*, 11, 2006, p. 167-88.

<sup>60</sup> For a further episode in an unfortunately long list of laments about the sorry state of Italy's public memory, see Simon LEVIS SULLAM, «January 27, Remembrance Day: ordinary Italians and genocide 1943-45», 2013, <[http://www.primolevicenter.org/Essays%26Interviews/Entries/2013/1/27\\_January\\_27,\\_Remembrance\\_Day\\_\\_ordinary\\_Italians\\_and\\_genocide\\_1943-45.html](http://www.primolevicenter.org/Essays%26Interviews/Entries/2013/1/27_January_27,_Remembrance_Day__ordinary_Italians_and_genocide_1943-45.html)> [Accessed 18 February 2013].